



Greetings,

Through the guidance provided by its national board of directors and state education directors, Farmers Union has chosen “Growing Good Taste” as its 2011 youth education curriculum theme.

National Farmers Union has a rich and storied history of being a successful advocate for providing Americans, and especially children, with nutritional diets. In the 1940s, Farmers Union helped bring the National School Lunch Program to our schools. In the 1950s we worked to get the School Milk Program in schools. More recently, Farmers Union was the leading organization in advocating for country-of-origin labeling on food products. This achievement matches the demand of consumers to know where their food comes from. Farmers Union is a leading proponent of the “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” movement that aims to reconnect America’s farm and ranch families with consumers.

The curriculum presented here addresses many concerns we all have regarding healthy diets and making sure consumers know their food really comes from America’s farm and ranch families. The lesson plans also look at how producers receive just pennies from every food dollar spent by consumers.

By using these lesson plans, you and your students will discover how the food supply chain works, why farmer-owned cooperatives count, and what steps can be taken to increase good health and reduce waistlines. As in past years, these lessons are targeted to four age groups in grades 1-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. The lessons use a variety of activities, demonstrations and discussions to engage students. As a bonus, we have added another section for collegiate and adult students.

Please accept my personal gratitude for the time and energy you dedicate to educating our members, regardless of their ages.

Sincerely,

Roger Johnson, President
National Farmers Union

Growing Good Taste

Youth Leader Overview

An old cliché says, “What goes around, comes around.”

Fifty years ago, the locally-owned community grocery store sold bread from a local bakery, milk from a local creamery, and meat from a local “locker plant.” Many of the vegetables and fruits came from local growers. In simple terms, a community fed itself and food didn’t travel far from farm to fork. Since then, food has become highly processed and highly impersonal and accounts for thousands of miles of transportation. Producers and consumers were squeezed farther apart by the large food companies that took over the middle of the food supply chain.

Why, then, are farmers’ markets, “buy local” campaigns, and community gardens increasing in popularity? Even major grocery stores, like Walmart, and fast food chains are using local food sources as a marketing concept. It is because consumers are asking where their food comes from. Consumers are demanding – and paying for – food that comes from the family farmers and ranchers they trust.

Teaching the Next Generation of Consumers Today

Children of all ages are eager to learn about everything in their world. Eating behaviors develop at early ages in children. It is important to introduce and instill healthy eating choices. At the same time, children are relatively unaware of where their food comes from, other than a refrigerator, a grocery store, or McDonald’s. These lesson plans will do much to make children appreciate that food comes from America’s family farms and ranches.

Equally important is the need to educate children on intelligent eating. One in three children are overweight or obese. In the United States, children get 40 percent of their daily calories from fat and sugar, mostly from these five food items: soda pop, fruit drinks, desserts, pizza, and whole milk. These lessons stress the need for people to seek out more balance and moderation in their diets following USDA’s five food groups of grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, and meat and proteins.

Farmers Union’s Role

Students will learn that Farmers Union is sponsoring their lessons. As an organization of family farmers and ranchers, Farmers Union supports the “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” programs. Consumer demand for fresh, source-verified, direct from the farm food is the fastest growing segment of the food business. Consumers want to know where the food they feed their families comes from, which is why Farmers Union led the charge for country-of-origin food labeling. Direct selling by farmers to consumers, retailers, and restaurants are the direct results of the buy fresh, buy local movement sweeping the nation. Several lessons incorporate cooperative learning activities, and Farmers Union promotes cooperatively working to find win-win solutions for producers and consumers.

Tips for Using NFU's Lesson Plans

1. **Be prepared.** These lessons are designed to be educational, fun, and challenging. You will be most successful in presenting these lessons by thoroughly reading each lesson plan from beginning to end and visualizing how certain activities will work before you present them to your students.
2. **Go with the flow.** Many factors can change the outcome of a lesson, such as having too few or too many students, a meeting area full of distractions, and dealing with children who may be especially engaging (or not enough) in each step of every lesson. Relax, adjust your teaching plan according to conditions, and don't sweat it if you get done a few minutes early or a lesson takes a few minutes more than planned.
3. **Blend age groups.** Some of these lessons will have broad appeal for students in other age groups. Depending on the size of your classes, you may want to mix age groups differently than suggested in the lesson plans. Also, use older children to help with activities for younger children if it works for your classroom settings. Younger children can perform "show and tell" examples to older students.
4. **It begins with you.** These lessons are the starting point. If you see ways to localize them or otherwise adapt them to better address specific relevant topics, please do so.

Additional Resources

National Farmers Union (nfu.org) and your own state Farmers Union organization has more information about how Farmers Union serves its members, strengthens family farm agriculture, and enhances rural communities.

Various federal agencies provide authoritative information, graphics, and other supportive information at these web sites:

- For *MyPyramid* information: www.MyPyramid.gov
- Nutrition and health: www.nutrition.gov
- Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion: www.cnpp.usda.gov
- Food and Nutrition Service/USDA Team Nutrition: www.teamnutrition.usda.gov
- Eat Smart. Play Hard: www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhard
- FDA food labeling information: www.cfsan.fda.gov
- Dietary guidelines: www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines
- Surgeon General: www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity

This project was made possible by:

The CHS Foundation (www.chsfoundation.org), which is the major giving entity of CHS, Inc. (www.chsinc.com) As part of the CHS stewardship focus, the CHS Foundation is committed to investing in the future of rural America, agriculture, and cooperative business through education and leadership development.



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